

**The world as it is / the world as I would like it to be: contemporary reflections on Freud's  
Formulations on the two principles of mental functioning.**

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**Introduction**

The editors inform us that this work amounts to a kind of stock-taking, namely that Freud is bringing findings from an earlier period into line with his current thinking and also laying the basis for the major theoretical works to come. Yet in a certain sense this is too static a view, for the paper is not best thought of as *one* of the building blocks of Freud's developing theory, it addresses concerns that are foundational to the whole psychoanalytic project. It would be hard indeed to think of a single paper written by Freud that does not to some extent depend upon the kinds of distinctions brought in this paper, and for many it is central. 'On Narcissism' (Freud 1914) shows how we only *seem* to abandon the illusions that serve to maintain our infantile narcissism, whilst secretly maintaining them (in our attitudes to leaders, to our children and so on), the 'Future of an Illusion' (Freud 1927) provides an apt illustration of the ways in which we keep alive a satisfying falsehood to protect ourselves from the harsh realities of life. And, of course, an important dimension of psychopathology lies in our capacity to sustain illusions and self-deceptions that defend us from inner realities we cannot tolerate, whilst the psychoanalytic method affords us the opportunity to witness these illusions at the moments of their construction, as living phenomena in the consulting room. Once Freud had formulated the death drive (Freud 1920), the models of psychic activity which serve the pleasure principle take on a darker colour, as pleasure in destruction of the self and others becomes a focus of attention.

I will start with an exploration of some themes of FTPMF as they are refracted through Freud's developing theory and will then move on to bring them into relation with the work of Klein and Bion. Finally, I will bring some broader reflections as regards the relevance of this perspective on mental life to the understanding of sociocultural phenomena at our current

historical conjuncture.

### **Some initial reflections on the paper**

To put it briefly and somewhat tersely, Freud described a system of thinking that is largely unconscious, which functions in a different way (the primary process) and is governed by a principle whose aim is to provide pleasure or, to reduce unpleasure<sup>1</sup>. The paradigm situation is of the early organism maintained in kind of pure pleasure state where all basic needs are either actually (that is materially) satisfied or, alternatively, are satisfied through hallucination. This latter, that is satisfaction through hallucination, provides the genetic precursor for a 'mode of thought'<sup>2</sup> that continues throughout life and which for Freud constitutes a fault line in the mental apparatus- for we are all fated to misunderstand or misrepresent the world in a manner which corresponds not to reality, but to our wishes. The contents of consciousness are, according to this principle not only under the influence of this principle but are *determined* by it.

Shakespeare provides us with the following fine illustration:

*Prince Henry: I never thought to hear you speak again*

*King Henry IV: Thy wish was father, Harry, to that thought*

(Henry IV Pt 2 Act 4 Sc V)

Note here the precision of the King's response. He shows young Henry not only that he has a hidden wish, that is to murder his father and seize the crown (and of course Shakespeare speaks through King Henry and the Prince for all fathers and sons) but, further, that he misrepresents reality in such a way as to make it accord with his wishes.

In the scene prior to this the Prince has removed the crown from the king's pillow (and in some

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Freud oscillates as to whether the organism aims towards pleasure or a reduction in unpleasure. I will comment further upon this below.

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I have put 'mode of thought' in parentheses as one could argue that this is a system of 'unthinking', serving to undo the capacity for thought.

performances even tries it on) and so, if we can be allowed this licence, we might imagine him as here indulging a daydream, one of our most transparent locations for witnessing the activities so the pleasure principle.

If Henry daydreams of being king, in the daydream he *is* king, he rules and experiences the satisfactions appropriate to such a daydream. This is a fully conscious event to a very significant degree dominated by the pleasure principle. However to the extent to which he recognizes, even whilst daydreaming that this is not reality, he remains in touch with reality. But even so, when fully immersed in his daydream, there will be moments in which he lives it as true. What is *unconscious* then is not the content of the daydream but the wishes which it both represents and conceals. In his daydream Prince Henry may imagine his father as having died a natural and noble death, happily passing on the crown to his beloved son- what remains unconscious is the death wish towards the father, and so to triumph over him.

Although Freud talks of a *substituting* the reality principle for the pleasure principle, this should not be taken too literally as Freud writes:

*‘With the introduction of the reality principle one species of thought-activity was split off; it was kept free from reality-testing and remained subordinated to the pleasure principle alone. This activity is phantasying, which begins already in children’s play, and later, continued as day-dreaming, abandons dependence on real objects’*

This alternative reality, as Freud says, although leading a kind of independent ‘split off’ existence, is highly consequential for the way we live our lives. In this domain thought reality is equated with external reality, wishes with their fulfilment.

This *psychical* reality dominates over material reality in the neuroses and thus to a varying extent in all of us. Freud described these phantasies as having strong ties to the sexual instincts and thus subject to repression, becoming manifest in daydreams and children’s play. But, do we not usually take it that the kinds of phantasy activity in daydream, in dream and in unconscious phantasy are quite distinct from each other? Freud is as much pained to emphasise the links between these aspects of our psychology as he is to differentiate them from each other. The boundaries between different aspects of the mind should not be regarded as discrete and fixed, he offers us a better representation:

*'We cannot do justice to the characteristics of the mind by means of linear contours, such as occur in a drawing or in a primitive painting, but we need rather the areas of colour shading off into one another that are to be found in modern pictures. After we have made our separations, we must allow what we have separated to merge again (Freud 1932 p 105)*

This has a bearing on an important tension as regards the way we use the word *fantasy*<sup>3</sup> - on the one hand to refer to mental activities which bear a stamp of lightness, whimsy, perhaps most characteristic of wishes and daydreams, and on the other hand to refer to something more profound, namely *phantasy* as the deep content of our psychic lives. When we use the term in the former way it can tend to depreciate the importance of psychic reality (see Isaacs p158 in Steiner).

A simple example of a dream representing simple wish fulfilment is offered by Freud in his account of the famous dream of his daughter: “Anna Freud, stawbewwies, wild stawbewwies, omblet, pudden!”. The pull towards wish fulfilling *fantasy* is of course never overcome, it remains a continuing register of our psychic lives, with qualities that are very far from being *only* problematic, for *phantasies* give our lives resonance and meaning<sup>4</sup>. Further, it is through the medium of *phantasy* that defensive structures take root in our minds and we all have our own peculiar and individual areas of difficulty from which we escape by use of our corresponding default *fantasy*.

Ms H was a woman in her 40's who was displaced by a younger brother when she was 3 years old and, as we came to understand, this event had permanently coloured her way of thinking about herself and the world. She was always late for her sessions and yet it was clear that she never intended to be late, it was just that somehow she always felt she could deal with “one last thing” before she left home to come to her session. For instance she could make a call which “only needed a few minutes” or deal with some other matter which was, she thought quite straightforward.. However these last minute tasks always

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This is of course the reason for the convention of using the term ‘*phantasy*’ to describe unconscious psychic processes, to distinguish it from the more common use of the term ‘*fantasy*’

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Wollheim writes ‘A person leads his life at a crossroads: at the point where a past that has affected him and a future that lies open, meet in the present’. As I have put it elsewhere: psychoanalysis lives exactly on this crossroad. Our work aims to interrupt past determinations, through discovering them as living entities, *phantasies*, in the present. We aim not to rid the mind of any *phantasies* but more for the individual to come to learn how his life is stained and illuminated by them, and so understand himself better.

took more time than anticipated and so, as a result, she was again late. One day, when we were discussing this she suddenly recalled being at an airport and seeing a young couple with their (only) child. They bought one of those small presentation boxes of very expensive chocolates in which there were only 4 chocolates. She said “ So it was one chocolate for each of the parents and two for the child’. She then lapsed into a thoughtful silence which ended with her saying somewhat ruefully “If they have another child , then it will be only one chocolate each’.

We were then able to understand how she had continued throughout her life to think of herself as having once occupied a very special privileged position, where she could, so to speak, have twice as much as ordinary people ( represented by the parents who, in contrast to the child, only have one chocolate each). The arrival of her brother toppled her from this special position and she fell into the world of the ordinary reality (represented by “one chocolate each”), which however she had never really been able to accept – following Freud we might say *‘one species of thought-activity was split off; it was kept free from reality-testing and remained subordinated to the pleasure principle alone’*. In that world she could do her e-mails or phone calls or whatever, and be on time for her session. That is she was still trying (and failing) to maintain a position in which she had twice as much reality as anyone else.

These kinds of difficulties we understand as narcissistic, they attempt to restore a picture of ourselves and our lives that harks back to a much earlier time.

To some extent we all engage in a kind of ‘double book keeping’<sup>5</sup>, that is for particular events we inscribe one version of it in the ledger of reality and another in a more secret place. It is in this latter location that, for example, a success in life is secretly registered as proof of omnipotence. For example, amongst those in high office there will always be some for whom the inscription in the ledger of omnipotence carries particularly heavy weight and , as a result, it is they who will be most at risk when they step down from their position. For this readjustment as to their place in the world can bring crashing in upon them an awareness of the illusoriness of

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The term ‘double bookkeeping’ comes from classical German psychiatry where it referred to certain psychotic people who kept ‘one book’ in reality and another more private one in their delusions.

the omnipotent world they have occupied, and the result can be serious breakdown

It is of course natural to think of the second book in my bookkeeping analogy, as supporting a happier wish for reality. But we have learnt of course that there is a very different kind of second ledger that treats every ordinary failure as incontrovertible proof of utter worthlessness, justifying omnipotent self contempt.

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A further difficulty in our reading of Freud arises from the natural tendency to counterpose phantasy to reality—phantasy here becomes a kind of mistake..

This kind of polarity between phantasy and reality tempts one to think that in some sense the acme of maturity would be to live a life dominated by the reality principle, positing some state in which ‘error’ can be transcended. But, a moment’s reflection demonstrates that such a life is neither possible nor desirable - there can be no phantasy free state. After all, it is the penetration of phantasy into our real perceptions of the world that gives those perceptions resonance and meaning - a life severed from this connection would, be deprived of all the qualities we naturally think of as being part of what it is to be human. Such a creature would be more like Mr Spock from Star Trek<sup>6</sup> someone, we might imagine, as being ruled exclusively by the reality principle, but we soon recognise this way of thinking as being logical but not human. One is reminded here of Bion’s description of the psychotic part of the personality as denuded, left with only logical thinking to deal with what once were emotional problems (Bion<sup>7</sup>).

Freud’s paper Negation (1925) casts a new light on the central issues addressed in FTPMF. For

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In fact Spock was half human and half Vulcan and thus to some extent never quite free of the potential intrusion of emotions although he seemed to have had the capacity to somehow make a choice in favour of pure logic.

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I have not been able to trace the origin of this quotation.

here he reveals that one of the highest human capacities, that is judgement, take its origin in primitive bodily activity. Accepting something as true has a genetic link to swallowing, rejecting something as false to spitting out or evacuating from other bodily orifices. Wollheim puts this well:

*Before this (judgement) can happen, a thought is first assimilated to a physical thing that at one moment can be in and the other moment be out of the body; a piece of food or faeces.... Thinking is then a physical activity which can bring a thing into or expel it from the body: for example swallowing, vomiting, retaining, defaecating. Bringing this thing in is the origin of assent; expelling the thing from the body is the origin of denial..... a child curious about his mother's body, assimilates its curiosity to this physical exploration.*

These are not just bodily metaphors for cognitive acts, for the ego itself is modelled on the body, the ego's activities, are lived as bodily activities,<sup>8</sup>. The archaic bodily theory of the mind will forever more stain and illuminate the mind's image of itself<sup>9</sup>.

Thus, under the aegis of the pleasure principle we swallow what we like and spit out or defecate what we do not like, whereas under the influence of the reality principle we 'swallow' something because it is true even though we do not like but then have to tolerate its presence inside us.

## **The Death Drive**

Perhaps at this juncture it might be helpful to think of FTPMF as describing both a general principle and a content. The general principle here would be the tendency of the mind to misrepresent reality, that is to misrepresent as being the case that which it wishes to be the case).

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We retain this knowledge in colloquialisms and slang- for example someone may express disagreement by saying "I will not swallow that"; an individual may tell someone who they experience as forcing an unwelcome view upon them "don't try to fill me with your shit" or "Keep your shit to yourself".

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The term 'the mind's image of itself' I owe to Richard Wollheim who used this as the title for his Ernest Jones Lecture, subsequently published (Wollheim1969)

The *content* refers to the kinds of wishes that are gratified in this manner (such as infantile sexual wishes). The introduction of the concept of the death drive in 1919 introduces not just a new kind of content but a new kind of pleasure. It is *not* a principle of mental functioning as such but a new drive of the psyche. In his initial introduction of the death drive Freud describes a kind of passive lure into a peaceful world of nothingness<sup>10</sup>. Later [the drive becomes understood in an entirely different manner, as a violent form of mental activity aimed at destroying the self and the object, a principle :

‘(whose) ) final aim is to undo connections and so destroy things’ (Freud 1930p.147 ).

There is thus a sense that what is beyond the pleasure principle is not beyond it, in that it is not to do with pleasure, but *is* beyond it in the sense that it is not to do with any particular pleasure<sup>1112</sup>. It is not the pleasure derived from the satisfaction of any particular desire, but a pleasure that derives from the *negation of all desire*<sup>13</sup>. Thinking places a demand upon the mind for work whereas the pleasure aimed at through this Nirvana-like principle is a pleasure that arises from the absence of work, mindlessness. It is an anti-thought principle and it is this aspect that has been most developed in the work of Bion as I will describe shortly.

### **Phantasy Reality and the Depressive Position**

Melanie Klein’s work takes us into a completely different conceptual register as regards our

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Freud’s use of the term Nirvana(which he borrowed from Barbara Low) is not correct as Nirvana refers to an emptying of the mind in order to access deeper layers of psychological experience

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Laplanche deals with this difficult as regards the nature of the pleasure associated with the death drive by distinguishing between the sexual life instincts and the sexual death instincts

understanding of the pleasure principle, one that although not departing from drive theory understands those drives as materialised in internal object relations. O'Shaughnessy captures well Klein's development:

*In her view the young infant defends his ego from intolerable anxiety by splitting off and projecting unwanted impulses, feelings, etc. into his object. This is an object relations perspective on the discharge of unpleasurable tensions and stimuli'*

The stress here, is thus more on the ridding the mind of unpleasant realities as opposed to the construction of alternative pleasure giving realities<sup>14</sup>. But it may not be so easy to distinguish in life between these two kinds of activity. For example when young Prince Henry believes his father to be dead, this can be understood both as his ridding his mind of an unpleasant reality (the continued existence of his father as an obstruction to his desire, occupation of the throne), and as an escape into a pleasurable reality (himself as king and father safely out of the way). I suspect in life these two process are inseparably bound up with each other. -the avoidance of unpleasure is inextricably bound up with the creation of the world of pleasure<sup>15</sup>.

*K is a 9 year old girl returning to her first session after a summer break. As I go to meet her in the waiting room she does not rush past me as she normally does. Instead I find her sitting calmly, legs crossed, reading a newspaper. I stand there not quite knowing what to do and clear my throat, somewhat pathetically, to attract her attention. She peers over the paper and says 'I will be with you in a minute'*

My young patient has, one might think, managed the break, or maybe more accurately, the return from the break, though creating an alternative reality, one that avoids the disturbing awareness that she has been waiting for her analyst. That is she has rid her mind of this

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It is not clear in Freud whether the experience of pleasure and the ridding the mind of unpleasure/pain are regarded as separable.

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If, following Bion's suggestion, we imagine a small child in pain and distress, being provided with love, care and the breast, and then at that moment defecating – we might imagine him as being unable to distinguish between the pleasures of being fed and provided for, and the pleasure derived from the feeling of having evacuated the object (faeces) imagined as being the source of his difficulty.

unpleasant situation, becoming identified with a calm superior analyst occupied with his own concerns, locating in her analyst this more difficult part of herself.

On my appearance she actualises (Sandler 1976) this internal situation, and does so with remarkable success

In the paranoid schizoid position, the relation to the world is more dominated by wish than by considerations of reality. However the establishment of a more securely internalised relation to a good objects, brings confidence and the capacity to tolerate frustration thus lessening the need for splitting and projection as way of managing mental distress, and so the mind becomes able to secure a firmer relation to reality, internal and external, which can thus be distinguished and allowed their own separate existence<sup>16</sup>. The world of the depressive position is thus much less dominated by wishful phantasy .

Freud suggests that in the earliest phases of life the mind is dominated almost exclusively by the pleasure principle although he concedes that such a situation must be to some extent a fiction, but one that can sustained if one includes the mother in this system. An alternative view, and one that I find more persuasive, is that even from the beginnings of life there is already present some primitive and fragile capacity for recognising what is real in the world, which exists in some kind of dynamic relation with the world of pleasure principle, in Bion's terms a 'protomental system'

### **Bion: the English return to Freud**

Bion, in the course of his work, revisits again and again a relatively small number of Freud's works, but in so doing gives them explosive new significance. Bion places great stress on FTPMF, centring his attention on the capacity to manage the frustration arising on the non-appearance of the desired object.

'The choice that matters to the psychoanalysts is one that lies *between procedures designed to*

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This way of expressing these changes- that is a firmly internalised good object increasing tolerance of frustration bringing in turn less need for projection etc. can make it seem that these changes occur in a sequential manner, but this is an artefact of their expression in language which is necessarily linear; in reality these changes all occur together and reflect a structural transformation- that is Klein's theory is a structuralist theory of mind.

*evade frustration and those designed to modify it. That is the critical decision* ( Bion 1962 p 29 italics in original).

Where Freud describes a mental apparatus that seeks to rid itself of an accumulations of stimulus, Bion sees these processes as a clinical event . He asks for example whether a patient's smile is a communication of affection or might be better understood as a use of the muscles of articulation in order to rid the mind of unpleasant sensation.

Returning now to the central statement of FTPMF:

*..it was only the non-occurrence of the expected satisfaction, the disappointment experienced, that led to the abandonment of this attempt at satisfaction by means of hallucination. Instead of it, the psychical apparatus had to decide to form a conception of the real circumstances in the external world and to endeavour to make a real alteration in them. A new principle of mental functioning was thus introduced; what was presented in the mind was no longer what was agreeable but what was real, even if it happened to be disagreeable. This setting-up of the reality principle proved to be a momentous step.*

The phrase “The non-occurrence of the expected satisfaction”, is somewhat ambiguous, For although the object may not be present and thus real satisfaction may not have occurred, there is a further condition that must be fulfilled in order for this to be a truly psychological situation,, that is there must be *awareness* of this situation. In other words, the actual absence of the object is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the mental development that Freud describes.<sup>17</sup>

Where the capacity for this transformation is lacking, that is when the awareness of the absent object cannot become a thought *about* an object (the ‘no breast becomes a thought,’) its fate is to become a malign object; the ‘no breast’ becomes a bad object<sup>18</sup>

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This is in reality only a re-framing and clarification of Freud's original formulation.(For further discussion of Bion on this topic see Bell 2011)

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It is reasonably assumed that the idea of absence is too sophisticated for the infantile mind which conceives not of absences but malign presences. In Mozambique the popular word for breakfast is the Portuguese ‘Matabicho’, a compound word made up from ‘matar’ (to kill) and ‘bicho’ a disgusting animal. Thus breakfast is the object that kills the bad object (the bicho) that is the source of inner persecution. That is the colloquial language

Thinking then, in Bion's sense is an expression of the epistemophilic drive of Freud and Klein; it brings thoughts together and links them with emotion, so giving them significance. .

Returning now to Negation , Freud (op cit) provides a description of two radically distinct modes of dealing with unwelcome thoughts. Firstly, negation is a way of ' taking cognisance of what is repressed'. Alternatively, there is something *qualitatively quite different*, which Freud terms 'the negativism which is displayed by some psychotics' which he links to 'the instinct of destruction' and quotes from Goethe's Faust to grasp its violence:

*'Woe! Woe!*

*Though hast it destroyed*

*The beautiful world*

*With powerful fist!*

*In ruin 'tis hurled,*

*By the blow of a demigod shattered*

(Freud 1910 p70)

Bion (1962) described a Mephistophelian principle, '-K', that opposes thought, separates thought from feeling, strips ideas of significance, and attacks all meaning. Negation under the aegis of this principle is *not* a first step toward judgment but an attack on the function that makes any judgments possible.

A question naturally arises as to whether hatred of thought is a kind of irreducible datum or is a manifestation of a deeper process. It seems to me that, at a very fundamental level , that the ego has a hatred of anything that is not itself , anything that presents itself to it as an obstruction<sup>19</sup> - the world, including the world of other minds, imposes exactly this kind of obstruction. But

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retains in poetic form the archaic experience.

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This has I think some relation to Freud's (1915) description of 'the narcissistic ego's primordial repudiation of the external world' (p138).

again this only becomes a truly psychological problem when there is *awareness* of these features of the world. From this perspective thinking, at some level, is hated because it presents itself to the mind as an obstruction, both because it is thought (and not action) and because such thinking brings to the mind the awareness of the features of reality just described. It is a case of shooting the messenger (awareness of reality) because the message (the limitations and obstructions imposed by the world) cannot be borne.

Mr G a successful businessman declared early on in his analysis that:

‘The thing that I want that I cannot have does not exist’

As I got to know Mr G I realised that this compacted statement had a number of articulations in his mental life. If an object appeared that he desired but could not control or possess then it was ejected from awareness, ceased to exist as an object in his world. On other occasions the object continued to exist but what was annihilated was his need for it, and sometimes with it his need for anything at all.

In other words Mr. G dealt with the awareness of the non-identity between what he wished for and what was available by destroying his own awareness of this situation and so the momentous step described by Freud could not be taken, as it would bring to the mind the awareness of need unsatisfied with all the attendant frustrations, something that for various reasons could not be borne.

There is in some cases a peculiar kind of ultimate pleasure associated with this destruction of the capacity to think, felt as a hated burden- it is perhaps one of deadliest of pleasures.<sup>20</sup>

## **Life, Death and Imagination**

The difficulties already alluded to, of counter-posing phantasy to reality, trench upon considerations of literature and imagination. We turn to literature *not* to escape reality; The

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I can well remembering witnessing on the psychiatric ward, the envy of the borderline patient for the schizophrenic - the latter was regarded as finally free of the hated burden of thought

artist's capacity for imagination, and our capacity to enter into an invented world, are amongst the most highly developed aspects of our psychic functioning, one of our most deeply valued forms of inner enrichment and one of our main points of contact with psychic reality.

But there is also a kind of literary activity that, though appearing similar, functions in a completely different way<sup>21</sup>. Far from enriching life, it serves to anaesthetise, it is 'anti-reality' providing release from pain and thus from thought with deadly results – one might think of various forms of 'pulp fiction' and some of the soap operas. The *inner* register of this activity is a kind of daydreaming which can have a malignant quality - one of the greatest works of literature exploring this second category is Flaubert's 'Madam Bovary'. Emma Bovary turns away from the disappointments of reality (her boring life with a country doctor) to the imaginary world she creates with her lover, with catastrophic results. Ighes Sodre has explored this in her paper 'Death by Daydreaming' (Sodre 1999)<sup>22</sup>. Arthur Miller's 'Death of a Salesman' does similar work for a contemporary audience. Willy Loman's addiction to an entirely fictional view of himself as the all American successful salesman can only result in his ruin and leads to suicide; Arthur Miller uses his character to show us how the dominant ideology draws individuals into this imaginary world, needs them to live in it, the play thus expresses at one and the same time an individual and deep cultural pathology.

Perhaps, where imagination is coupled to the life drive it tends towards exploration, curiosity and knowledge, it is growth promoting and brings pleasures of a deep nature; when linked to the death drive it can support an 'as if' world which merely repeats the same contents in thinly disguised forms, offers simple pleasures, prevents growth and has an addictive inner momentum. However one needs to bear in mind that these are not static categories but mobile

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Hanna Segal was an enthusiastic reader of science fiction and suggested that good science fiction explored the question 'what if?' that is what would life be like if such and such was the case (for example if people could read others minds). Here imagination expresses curiosity / exploration which is in contrast to that kind of writing which seeks to replace one reality with another without exploration- not 'what if?' but 'as if'.

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Dennis Potter, in his masterpiece 'Pennies from heaven' provided another brilliant exploration of this territory

dimensions. For what starts off as a lifesaving defence (the retreat into a pleasurable world to avoid unbearable pain) easily transforms into an excited addictive state, now serving far more perverse aims.

### **Enactment and its relation to the pleasure principle**

Freud's discovery of the centrality of the transference revealed the way in which the analysis although manifestly serving one aim (the development of understanding, the overcoming of symptoms) more secretly fulfils another, namely providing the vehicle for the continued fantasied gratification of infantile wishes. But, as in the whole history of psychoanalysis, what starts out as an apparent obstacle to treatment, moves to the centre of our understanding of the nature of psychic change. The analysis provides a context for these wishes to come to life, whilst at the same time creating the possibility for them to be recognized, tolerated and understood, a unique form of understanding. Insight of this type involves both the acceptance of the existence of unrealizable wishes and the recognition of our tendency to misrepresent the world as if it were fulfilling them. The capacity of the analytic setting to provide such insight depends upon its allowing these wishes and illusory gratifications to have their proper place, in the transference and the countertransference enactments, whilst not dominating to the extent that thinking becomes impossible. In other words, it is, to borrow Freud's term, a quantitative consideration<sup>23</sup>.

Freud (1937) discussed how individuals seek to re-create situations in life that serve to

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Freud uses two compelling metaphors to describe the analytic situation. Firstly as a playground, an intermediate area between fantasy and reality. However he goes on, it is inevitable that this 'as if' quality will be lost at certain crucial moments and here uses the compelling metaphor of someone shouting 'fire' in the theatre—and it is this situation that tests our mettle. He writes: *No matter how amenable she has been up till then, she suddenly loses all understanding of the treatment and all interest in it, and will not speak or hear about anything but her love, which she demands to have returned. She gives up her symptoms or pays no attention to them; indeed, she declares that she is well. **There is a complete change of scene; it is as though some piece of make-believe had been stopped by the sudden irruption of reality—as when, for instance, a cry of fire is raised during a theatrical performance. No doctor who experiences this for the first time will find it easy to retain his grasp on the analytic situation and to keep clear of the illusion that the treatment is really at an end*** (Freud 1915 p 162 emphasis added)

rationalize their defences, this functioning as a powerful force against any change, “a resistance against the uncovering of resistances” ( p. 238) – a ‘meta-resistance’ (my term) against any movement at all, and thus utterly opposed to all development whether it be in life or in the analysis; Freud regarded this as a manifestation of the death drive.

Another way of putting this is to see the mind as endeavouring to recreate externally its internal picture of the world, to make phantasy into reality. The paradigm of this state is hallucinatory wish-fulfilment which Freud likened to the ‘perceptual identity’ obtained in dreams. Enactment, through its attempt to secure this identity between inner and outer, seeks to re-create this ‘perceptual identity’(see Sandler1976, Feldman1997). The illusion, and it is always an illusion, as complete identity cannot of course ever be achieved<sup>24</sup> removes that foundation, perception of difference, on which thought depends; and the extent to which this is achieved is the extent to which thinking (or to use Freud’s term ‘judging’) becomes impossible. Although at some level, this urge to create symmetry between internal and external<sup>25</sup> may be just a simple fact of mental life, a kind of default system, it can I believe quickly be brought into service of the most deadly aims. The creation of this kind of identity between inner and outer can be associated with a pleasant state of absence of conflict, absence of tension; this pull towards mindlessness therefore reveals itself as heir to the ‘nirvana-like’ state referred to by Freud.

“This effort to keep constant or to remove internal tension due to stimuli” is, according to Freud, “one of our strongest reasons for believing in the existence of the death instinct” (Freud, 1920, pp. 55–6)..

### **Some broader cultural implications**

It would be hard indeed to think of anything in psychoanalysis that has more significance for human culture in general than the recognition of the fragility of the distinction between ‘the world as it is’ and ‘the world as I would like it to be’. The promise of fulfilment of infantile wishes permeates the discourse of everyday life both overtly (in advertising, political

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The degree of distortion that is necessary to maintain the illusion is a measure of the patient’s contact with

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sloganeering, celebrity culture) and also in ways which are more subtle, perhaps nowhere more so than in our relation to money and commodities, whose power derives in no small measure from their peculiar location within our psychic economy.

Freud thought that money could not bring happiness:

"Happiness is the deferred fulfilment of a prehistoric wish. That is why wealth brings so little happiness: money is not an infantile wish." (Freud Jan 16<sup>th</sup> 1988, letter to Fliess)

However one could perhaps add that money represents itself as if it could remove all obstructions to the realisation of those wishes. Freud like Marx recognised that money, like the commodity form itself, has a fetish like quality<sup>26</sup>. We cease to see it for what it is, that is for the social relations that it embodies, and imagine that the object itself has magical powers.

Throughout history humanity has created cultural objects whose function is to appear to gratify our desires in a simple way and the extent to which they do so is the extent to which they act as social breaks on our capacity for thought. For Freud the paradigmatic example was religion, a system of beliefs which serves to protect us from the painful burden brought by our recognition of mortality, limitation on our powers, ageing and human vulnerability in general.

However a kind of religious sentiment inevitably attaches itself to the ideology that comes to dominate an age which then functions as a kind of mass religion seducing us into submission. We are all subject to pressures arising from a conjunction of internal needs and external interests, that draw us into the childish belief that those in power know what they are doing, are looking after our interests, that is to treat them as idealised parental figures. What is most impressive is the resilience of this belief in the face of the evidence and perhaps nowhere is this clearer than in the management of the economy - discussed as if it represented brute (mathematical) facts of nature, rather than its reality as a manifestation of socio-political processes, disguised as balance sheets. Economic crises are presented not as revealing the fault

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I am using the term fetish in its quite ordinary sense- that is an object endowed with magical and spiritual powers. Freud's understanding of our peculiar relation to money is grounded in the theory of infantile development. For Marx this understanding derived derives from his more general recognition of commodities as social objects. The monetary value of a commodity appears to the workman as if it is something that arises directly from the object (a magical quality) whereas in reality it expresses the social relations between the different producers, the owners of capital and consumers-Marx called this 'commodity fetishism' see Capital Vol 1

lines of our manner of socio-economic organisation, but as unpredictable chance happenings that can be well managed by the very actors who are most closely implicated as causal agents of the catastrophe a most destructive wish fulfilling fantasy.

Viewing the crisis *historically*, gives emphasis to the real structures that endure in time, that is the systemic fault lines along which fractures inevitably take place.

There are certain aspects of the current crisis arising from the financialisation of the economy that make it peculiarly prey to these primitive processes. Financial products because of their non-material nature readily appear in our world as ‘fantastic objects<sup>27</sup>.’;

However there also needs to be a word of caution here as this might seem, to unwittingly imply that the market freed from these fantasised projections would then reveal itself to be rational (again a wish fulfilling presentation of reality)– whereas what the crises make manifest are the contradictions at the centre of our mode of socioeconomic life, their social relations they represent, and they do so with a peculiar nakedness .

In Group psychology (Freud 1921) showed how in groups we seem to be particularly prone to fall back into more infantile modes of functioning . Groups are thus capable of actions which, if they had been carried out by an individual, would have landed him in a psychiatric hospital. In war under the influence of leaders and group pressure, individuals who on Monday were friends and allies, on Tuesday see their erstwhile neighbours as the embodiment of evil as they set about annihilating each other. In ‘Freudian theory and the pattern of fascist propaganda’ (Adorno 1951) - perhaps the greatest interweaving of Marxist critical theory and psychoanalysis - Adorno points out that the fascist and his followers do not really believe in their heart of hearts that the Jew is evil. They know it is wish fulfilling fantasy. He goes on to say:

‘It is probably the suspicion of this fictitiousness of their own group psychology that makes fascist crowds so merciless and unapproachable. If they would stop to reason for a second, the whole performance would fall to pieces and they would be left in panic’.

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David Tuckett has carried out an extensive study of the phantasy structures that dominate the functioning of those whose task is to administrate finance capital see for example *Minding the Markets: An Emotional Finance View of Financial Instability*, New York and London by Palgrave Macmillan, 2011)

Thought is the enemy of this system and so must be resisted at all costs. Here one can see the need to avoid the unpleasure that thought would bring, combined with the pleasurable exaltation that results from release from reason, bringing a world free from doubt and guilt, leaving the way open to pure pleasure in destruction.

Segal makes an important contribution

to our understanding the degradation of politics in our contemporary world. She pointed out that differentiation between Bion's 'work group' and the 'basic assumption group' (and the basic assumption group is the wish fulfilling group) does not hold in the case in politics, at least in politics as it is now lived. In a sense there is no work group, as the work of the politician is to create and foster basic assumption mentality, that is to attract support not through argument but through the promotion of regression, "Follow me, I will transform the economy, make everyone safe, create law and order" and coming not far behind, 'get rid of those parasites ( that is immigrants) from abroad and shirkers at home, who leach on the civilised values of England's honest decent working people'<sup>28</sup>.

Here, promotion of regressive projective systems becomes the key to political success. This ideology with all its absurd propagandistic proclamations has its attractions - particularly for those who are the most insecure, who feel their place in the world is under threat, are burdened with a sense of their own superfluosity<sup>29</sup>, actual or threatened. Arendt and Adorno were writing in dark times which have their resonance in the current world situation.

### **A Philosophical note**

Freud's paper is embedded within a philosophical Weltanschauung founded on the centrality of

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This recalls Freud's description of the way the id disguises the its conflicts with reality and, if possible, its conflicts with the super-ego too. "In its position midway between the id and reality, it only too often yields to the temptation to become sycophantic, opportunist and lying, like a politician who sees the truth but wants to keep his place in popular favour"(Freud 9123 p 56)

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For Hannah Arendt, the category of superfluosity was a critical component of the elements of totalitarianism.

the distinction between the 'world as we would like it to be' and 'the world as it is'. This broadly realist ontology has however come under some attack from a 'postmodernist' epistemology which, celebrates the relativisation of all truth. This current of thought has been widely influential especially within the humanities and some have regarded it a natural philosophical 'home' for psychoanalysis; bringing psychoanalysis within the postmodern is thought of as liberating it from what is characterised (or, more properly, caricatured) as a naive scientism that makes omnipotent claims for objectivity and Truth.

Postmodernism as an epistemology, is not a child of High Modernism, which broke with old forms which constrained knowledge to discover deeper and disturbing truths, but instead stands in opposition to all claims of knowledge truth or reality. The tragic vision of man battling against the world and himself, is transformed at a stroke into a celebration of fluidity, plurality, change. As Eagleton (1996) and Harvey (1990) have pointed out, the world that is depicted is profoundly schizoid (by which they mean fragmented, alienated). But this form of existence does not bring the emptiness and despair which one might imagine is its counterpart, but instead becomes the basis of celebration of a bizarre wish fulfillment. Harvey puts it this way:

*'Its total acceptance of ephemerality, fragmentation discontinuity .... It does not try to transcend it.. or even define it.... postmodernism swims, wallows in the fragmentary currents of change, as if that is all there is'.(Harvey 1990 p 14)*

Identity as an enduring characteristic ceases to exist as identities and beliefs can be *chosen* to suit ones needs. Tragic man weighed down with sedimented layers of his own personal and cultural history is at a stroke transformed into light-hearted postmodernist man watching on with a knowing and ironic smile. The painful apprehension of complexity becomes 'the world can be what I want it to be', all struggle disposed of at one blow. Renik (1998) has suggested that truth is 'what works'. Here knowledge manifests itself as something one can choose to have, or not to have, not unlike an object on a supermarket shelf- and so this form of extreme relativisation reveals itself as the penetration of the commodity form into epistemology.

Where there is no truth, there is can be place mark for lies or self-deception<sup>30</sup>. Where all is

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As Bion has pointed out, because truth is something that we apprehend alongside others, it cannot be possessed whereas the lie, because it is self-constructed, can be possessed, which accounts in part for our

surface, the crucial distinctions, illusion-truth, appearance – reality, dissolve, as does all that depends on these crucial differentiations. And so, as I see it, a major foundation of psychoanalysis, and for other forms of thoughtful engagement with the world, falls away.

### **Concluding Comment**

Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning covers in the space of a few pages, a territory that has remained foundational not only to psychoanalysis but to a form of thinking in which psychoanalysis will continue to find a natural home. I am referring to those modes of engagement with the world in which concepts such as illusion/deception vs truth, surface versus depth, fantasy versus reality, all continue to have a place. For the distinctions which Freud draws remain essential in order for us to be able to engage in the endless struggle to achieve a firmer relation to ourselves and the world, whilst recognising the inevitable limitations, the forces we are up against- a truly tragic position. There is however no alternative, for the struggle for truthfulness and the struggle for our human survival are inseparable and in this spirit I will end with quotation from Hannah Arendt who well understood the critical nature of this position.

“Could the activity of thinking as such, the habit of examining whatever happens.

. . .could this activity be among the conditions that make men abstain from

evil-doing or even actually ‘condition’ themselves against it.”

Hannah Arendt